

## ORAL QUESTIONS 44 QUESTIONS ORALES

June 6, 2012

Not finalized / Non finalisé

le 6 juin 2012

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Once again, we believe that the people in this province recognize the services that they get, they recognize that there is a value for those services, and they recognize that there is a need to pay for that value.

In the case of the license plates, we looked at the cost of delivering. We looked at the cost of manufacturing. We also looked at the best way to provide those plates. We also even asked the question: Do we even need to have two plates? We had those questions as well. Those questions were answered by our police, who said: Yes, we think that we need to continue in that tradition.

In the fact of saying that we need to have two plates, here is what the cost of them really is. It is easy to say that we doubled this or that, but, if you look at the actual duration of time since this was last changed and the actual cost differential and how often new plates are purchased for vehicles, it is a very minor increment in a person's life. Thank you.

**Mr. Boudreau:** This minister keeps getting up and saying that people who buy homes and people who buy cars are not ordinary New Brunswickers. I would ask this of the minister: What is his definition of an ordinary New Brunswicker if a tax applied to buying a new home is not considered a tax on an ordinary New Brunswicker or if a tax that is going to be doubled for people buying new license plates for a car is not a tax that affects ordinary New Brunswickers? What exactly is his definition of an ordinary New Brunswicker?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Ordinary New Brunswickers have said: Fix this problem. Ordinary New Brunswickers have said: We want to play our part.

We believe that the government needs to play its part and to get its fiscal house in order. We need to get our expenses in order, but they are willing to play their part. On a home worth \$100 000, a \$250 increase in the transfer tax is not going to make a difference in a person's life. It is not going to make a difference in terms of whether you actually purchase that home or not. How many homes does a person buy in the run of a lifetime? Three or four, maybe?

We are looking at incremental improvements in areas where we are deficient in the cost of the service. We feel good about it and about the comments. I do not believe that I received one complaint about the home transfer tax—not one—and I do not expect to hear any about the license plates, unless it is from the members opposite.

### Appointments

**Mr. Boudreau:** On another issue, again, this is a question for the Minister of Finance since he is also the minister of human resources. I noticed that, in today's *Globe and Mail*, there happens to be a job posting for a deputy minister position in the government of the Northwest Territories. I am just curious about whether the minister of human resources is the minister who decided not

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to post a similar job opening for the position of CEO of Efficiency NB, which was awarded to Margaret-Ann Blaney without competition.

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** I think it is good that the members opposite are looking at employment across Canada. They will likely need it.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** We are looking at evaluating positions within the civil service. We are looking at how we manage the portfolio. We are looking at all aspects of that.

I do not think that we have any moral grounds to complain about each other with regard to how we do that or how we can improve. I think that we both should be challenged on how we can do things better. I think that we both need to be part of that improvement process. He cannot look across the floor and criticize things that each of us does. None of us feels good about it. I think that there is an opportunity for improvement and an opportunity for us to work together for improvement. I would welcome the ability for us to do that on key issues. The offer is open, and I am willing to participate.

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10:45

**Mr. Boudreau:** According to the Alward government, the only person who was in need of a job was Margaret-Ann Blaney because it did not post a competition. I find it very interesting that the minister just said that none of us feels good about it.

I guess that brings me back to a question I had for the Minister of Finance last week. Is the appointment of Margaret-Ann Blaney as CEO of Efficiency NB a want or a need of the Alward government?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** This issue has been covered quite extensively over the past week and a half. The Premier made it very clear last week that it was a decision of his. He made it clear that that was his appointment. I am not in a position to make any comments on that, as you are well aware. It was his decision. He admitted that, and he talked about it. Let's not spend time going down that trail, which has no real value.

We are looking at assessing every opportunity that we have. We are looking at creating efficiencies in the system. We do need to be examples for the people we expect to deliver on the performance of this province—the people and the civil service, who are watching us every day in the moves we make, the questions we ask, and the responses we give. Our leadership in this province will be a direct contributor to how we succeed together in this province. I expect the full support of the members opposite. Thank you.

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**Mr. Boudreau:** I would not be surprised if the Premier were throwing a minister under the bus, but to see a minister throw the Premier under the bus on an issue like this is quite surprising.

He is the minister of human resources. He is the minister who decides when competitions go out or do not go out. He allocates the staff ratios for the various departments, so he is the minister in charge of this. I want to know his opinion on the appointment of Margaret-Ann Blaney as CEO of Efficiency NB. Is it a want or a need? That is how he so eloquently described it during the various budget consultation processes he went through. Is it a want or a need for the province?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** As the Leader of the Opposition well knows, the appointment of deputy ministers is a function of the Premier. It is not a function that I control or that any of my colleagues control. The members opposite know the process well, so I do not think there is any need to debate that in any extensive way because that is the system.

I think we are looking at every area to determine whether it is a want or need. We will all have different interpretations of what that means. You will have much different interpretations than I. You want a lot of things that I see no value in. I do not think it is a surprise that we have issues that we will debate back and forth, but I do think that the opportunity to move forward and to find some collective issues that we can agree on and that we can make a difference on are the things that people are looking for us to lead on. I am really hoping that that can be a process that we can start to change, one item at a time. Thank you.

**Mr. Boudreau:** I will simplify the question. Does the minister support the Premier's appointment of Margaret-Ann Blaney? Yes or no?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** I think that, last week, the Premier made it very clear in his statements and his response to the members opposite. There was no confusion about his position, his decision, or the fact that it is his decision to make.

I have been clear that, in my focus, in looking at opportunities, opportunities that I believe we collectively can influence, we need to continue to influence those and we need to make changes. We need to improve the system gradually so that it gets better. I am counting on that continued support here. I am counting on the fact that we can move forward. We will move forward one decision at a time, getting better one decision at a time and not criticizing decisions that one party or another party makes. It is the same decision process. We have to get better at this, and we can do it one decision at a time. Thank you.